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Elizabeth Jacobs

The Theatrical Politics of Chicana/Chicano Identity: from Valdez to Moraga

Critical opinion over the role of popular culture in relation to ethnic and cultural identity is deeply divided. In this essay, Elizabeth Jacobs explores the dynamics of this relationship in the works of two leading Mexican American playwrights. Luis Valdez was a founding member of El Teatro Campesino (Farmworkers' Theatre) in California during the 1960s. Originally formed as a resistance theatre, its purpose was to support the Farmworkers' Union in its unionization struggle. By the early 1970s Valdez and the Teatro Campesino were moving in a different direction, and with *Zoot Suit* (1974) he offered a critique of the race riots that erupted in East Los Angeles during the summer of 1943, the subsequent lack of reasonable judicial process, and the media misrepresentation of events. Valdez used setting, music, slang, and dress code among other devices to construct a sense of identity and ethnic solidarity. This provided a strong voice for the Chicano group, but at the same time a particular gendered hierarchy also distinguished his aesthetic. Cherrie Moraga's work provides a balanced opposition to that of Valdez. *Giving up the Ghost* (1984) helped to change the direction of Chicano theatre both in terms of its performativity and its strategies of representation. Elizabeth Jacobs explores how Moraga redefines both the culturally determined characterization of identity presented by Valdez and the media representation of women. She also utilizes theatrical space as a platform for a reassertion of ethnicity, allowing for the innovation of a split subjectivity and radical lesbian desire. *Giving up the Ghost*, Jacobs argues, provides a trenchant critique of communal and popular culture discourses as well as a redefinition of existing identity politics.

IN THE following essay I explore the relation between Mexican American identity politics and popular culture through the lens of two plays. Firstly I read *Zoot Suit* (1974) by Luis Valdez as a reflection of the politics of the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in its gendered representation of identity. I contextualize my reading of the play in terms of its radical critique of historical events as well as some of the more dominant concerns of the Chicano movement. I then go on to read Cherrie Moraga's *Giving up the Ghost* (1984) as a counter-discursive critique of *Zoot Suit*'s political configuration. As I go on to show, it is important to place Moraga's text in this context in order to explore more fully its disruption of Chicano theatrical canons as well as dominant narratives of identity proposed during the movement decades.

The Chicano movement grew out of an alliance of diverse groups including farm workers in California and Texas, land grant

owners in New Mexico, the urban working classes of the Southwest and Midwest, and the increasingly radicalized student groups across the country. The politics of these differing groups initially coalesced around a consensus of socio-political and cultural concerns. These included arguing for such basic rights as just representation in government and the courts, fair treatment from the police and the military, a decent standard of living, and bilingual and bicultural education.

The organizations established to press the existing authorities and to achieve these aims included the UFW (the United Farmworkers' Union), the United Mexican American Students (UMAS), and the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) in California, the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Alliance of Free City States) in New Mexico, the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) and La Raza Unida Party in Texas, and the nationwide Mexican American Legal Defence and Education Fund (MALDEF).¹

To this end several plans were also drawn up, including *El plan de Santa Bárbara* (1969), MEChA's educational programme, and *El plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (1969), arguably the movement's most radical statement concerning issues of Chicano identity and land rights, and earlier than this the groundbreaking *El plan de Delano* (1965), a stated proclamation of rights by the United Farmworkers' Union.

Initially, Luis Valdez and his theatre group Teatro Campesino (Farmworkers' Theatre), were closely linked to the farmworkers' struggle in California, and their satirical skits, known as *actos*, focused solely on farm labour problems. By 1967 this bond was severed, firstly by the leader of the farmworkers, César Chávez, who made it clear that the Farmworkers' Union did not support Valdez's leanings towards Chicano nationalism, and secondly by Valdez himself, whose own ambitions led him to move away from the struggles associated with farmworkers and towards other sites of oppression.

As the Chicano movement gained momentum, activism from other quarters suggested that the content of the plays had to be expanded, and Valdez was also aware that the vast majority of Chicanos lived in cities and that it was this urban-based audience who were most likely to be sympathetic to his form of cultural expression.

In Los Angeles the politics of the times were characterized by organizations such as the Brown Berets, the Chicano Moratorium Committee, and the Centro de Acción Social Autónomo, or CASA, by student walkouts, or 'blowouts' as they were called, and by mass protests such as the Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War. It was also during this period that Valdez began to play a pivotal role in the formation of Chicano identity politics, founding the theatre group TENAZ and contributing a prolific dramatic output, though it was *Zoot Suit* which became his most commercially successful play to date.

Returning to a decisive phase in the Mexican American experience for its sources, *Zoot Suit* depicts the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial of 1942 and the subsequent 'zoot suit riots' that erupted in East Los Angeles and

other cities a year later. These events, representing one of the many miscarriages of justice in Chicano history, profoundly affected the community of the East Side *barrios*. In the Sleepy Lagoon trial, which one character in the play describes as 'the largest mass trial in the history of Los Angeles county', twenty-two youths were tried on sixty-six charges, wrongfully indicted for the murder of another gang member, Jose Diaz, and sent to prison.

Legacy of the Sleepy Lagoon Trial

The riots, which emerged as a result of the trial, consisted of the mass beating and stripping of young Mexican Americans wearing zoot suits by groups of US servicemen exuding patriotic fervour. Conversely, general opinion as to what had occurred almost unanimously blamed the riots on Mexican American youth.² Sometimes called *cholos*, but more often *pachucos*, they were characterized by their sense of alienation from mainstream America, most obviously by their use of a hybrid slang known as *calo*, by their tattoos – and by their distinctive suits.

These characteristics expressed the complexity of Chicano identity at a transitional historical moment. During the 1930s the continued migration of Mexicans into the United States contributed to the creation of a distinctive *barrio* culture in Los Angeles, particularly in Belvedere and Boyle Heights, which became important settings for the definition of Chicano identity.³ These areas were also distinguished by racial restrictions, class barriers, poor and congested housing, and police repression. Encountering such racial discrimination only strengthened the quest for a sense of identity among Mexican American youth, and in effect provided a unique context for the development of the zoot suit and the *pachuco* gang.⁴

The representation of the *pachucos* by Valdez in *Zoot Suit* clearly conforms to this perspective. The lead figure, 'El Pachuco', is a constant presence and serves as a commentator on the action, providing the incarcerated gang leader, Henry Reyna, with inner strength during his trial and subsequent soli-

tary confinement. El Pachuco's opening speech, delivered in a mixture of *calo* and English, clearly articulates his central importance to the forthcoming action and, together with the directions for the stage settings, sets the tone of the play and foreshadows much of the action:

Setting: the giant facsimile of a newspaper front page serves as a drop curtain.

The huge masthead reads: los angeles herald express thursday, june 3, 1943. A headline cries out: zoot-suiter hordes invade los angeles. us navy and marines are called in. A switchblade plunges through the newspaper. It slowly cuts a rip to the bottom of the drop. el pachuco emerges from the slit. He adjusts his clothing, he tends to his hair, with infinite loving pains. Then he reaches into the slit and pulls out his coat and hat. Now he turns to the audience. He proudly, slovenly, defiantly makes his way downstage. He stops and assumes a pachuco stance.⁵

Differing Interpretations of Zoot Suit

Jorge Huerta argues that this setting and prop design indicate the degree to which the Los Angeles newspapers and the national media of the time contributed to the racial hostilities by demonizing *pachucos* during the trial and subsequent riots.⁶ Several scenes substantiate this claim, and have actors and actresses moving towards the audience holding sensationalized front-page headlines and editorial accounts that emphasize Mexican immigration, delinquency, and gangsterism. These headings are at the same time juxtaposed with accounts of allied activities in the war effort, which are similarly infused with the fifth-column rhetoric that dominated the media's output, thereby increasingly depicting the *pachuco* youth as the 'enemy within'.

The scenes are interpreted from a slightly different perspective by Carl Gutiérrez Jones. He states that by thus highlighting the racial bias of the media, Valdez counterbalances the widespread belief that the zoot-suiters were guilty of deviating from what was an otherwise fair and democratic society.⁷ The fact that the trial is presented as a breach of legitimate judicial procedures further emphasizes this point. Despite the lack of any

concrete evidence, an all-white jury indicts seventeen gang members for first-degree murder during courtroom proceedings that were clearly racially biased.

In the play this is most obviously reflected in the uncompromising efforts of the prosecution to stigmatize and pathologize the defendants. During the interrogation it is suggested that the young Mexican Americans are 'greasers', 'animals', and 'monkeys'.⁸ Additionally it is said that they have 'twisted minds' and are capable of 'assault' and 'more violence'.⁹ The prosecution lawyer also manipulates evidence, openly intimidates the defendants, and draws attention to their zoot suits as evidence of guilt.

The fact that the judge at the same time prevents the defendants from changing their clothes adds to the circumstantial evidence.¹⁰ Firstly this accentuates their 'criminality' making them appear in the words of the gang leader, 'bad' and 'disreputable, like mobsters'; and secondly it strips them of their identities. In this sense, the court's actions mirror the events of the zoot suit riots themselves, when the *pachucos* were similarly demonized and 'symbolically annihilated, castrated, transformed, and otherwise rendered the subject of effigial rites'.¹¹

Perhaps the most effective but also problematic attempt to counter this discourse occurs in Act Two, Scene 6, when El Pachuco is stripped of his zoot suit by a group of sailors and appears as a god-like descendant of the Aztecs:

They fight now to the finish. el pachuco is overpowered and stripped as henry watches helplessly from his position. The press and servicemen exit with pieces of el pachuco's zoot suit. el pachuco stands. The only item of clothing on his body is a small loincloth. He turns and looks at henry, with mystic intensity. He opens his arms as an Aztec conch blows, and he slowly exits backward with powerful calm into the shadows.¹²

With this climactic conversion scene, Valdez places the *pachuco* within a specific ideological locus. The gesture of ennobling Chicanos with pre-Columbian attributes was a well-used strategy throughout the movement, and instilled a sense of pride and his-

torical identity, providing an antidote to racism.

The subject position Valdez creates here, then, is on one level oppositional to the kind of discourse perpetrated by the media and courts. Rather than signalling a series of pathologies, pre-Columbian attributes instil in the *pachuco* a subliminal power. Thus charged and justified by the identity politics of the Chicano movement, he is able to transcend the *barrio* hierarchy, from the socially deviant gang member as seen from the perspective of the media, judge, prosecution, and American servicemen into a godlike, sacrificial entity.

A Reverence for Machismo

But while redefining the *pachuco*'s place within a larger framework of the social drama of emancipation and self-determination of the 1960s and 1970s, *Zoot Suit* reinscribes a repressive ideology. Much of its rhetoric, like that of the movement, contains an underlying dynamic that aims to recover manhood. At this time myths of descent were inflected by a perception of the cultural past as a privileged site where configurations of masculinity and identity merged. The hagiography of the pre-Columbian past served to endorse a cultural legacy that embraced machismo and paternalism as unifying facets of Chicano identity. The combined effects of male domination and Chicano nationalism that shaped El Teatro's productions effectively replicated these tendencies.¹³

One of the most overt expressions of this ideology at work can be seen in the way that *Zoot Suit* mirrors the emphasis placed on the interlinking systems of *carnalismo*, *machismo*, and *familia* by movement discourse. Displays of *carnalismo* cemented the relations between men at the time of the movement, culturally organizing gender in such a way as to facilitate women's exclusion. Ideologically then, *carnalismo* worked to define all gender in relation to a clear and unambiguous male identity. At the same time, *carnalismo* worked towards defining the Chicano community 'as a social group consensually unified around a reverence for *machismo*'.¹⁴

Rendón, author of the highly polemical *Chicano Manifesto* (1971), stated this connection more explicitly. *Machismo*, he explained,

is in fact an underlying drive of the gathering identification of Mexican Americans. . . . the essence of *machismo*, of being *macho*, is as much a symbolic principle for the Chicano revolt as it is a guideline for family life.¹⁵

Yet claiming *machismo* as the fundamental dynamic of the movement was problematic, and set into motion a system of gender differentiation designed to maintain a form of male power and female subjugation. A significant proportion of male cultural production both during and after the movement decades reinforced this notion, the family figuring prominently in its representations as a paternalistic and largely conservative unit.

In many ways *Zoot Suit* overtly illustrates this point. The problems the Reynas face are counterpoised by the many allusions to the bonds of *familia*, its strengths and values, and its abiding links with the community. Following this logic, Valdez also depicts the father as being central to the Reyna home; he dominates his wife and daughter, silencing them and frequently evoking the masculine heroes of the Mexican revolution as well as his own experiences. *Zoot Suit* thus tends to reinforce the centrality of male subjectivity at the expense of and in relation to woman's marginality within the organizational structures of the household and the traditional familial order.

Within this symbolic system, Henry Reyna's mother Dolores is stereotyped as *una madrecita sufrida* (the suffering mother) who endures the aggression of *barrio* violence and endless domestic labour. But her labour is consistently overridden by her symbolic designation as mother, and thus her specificity as a female subject as well as her labour are subordinate to her role as nurturer of men. Lupe, Henry's sister, is another case in point, since she is forbidden to wear the drapes of the zoot suit, and is told by Enrique, her father, that things are 'different for Henry . . . He's a man. *Es hombre . . . Bien macho!* Like his father.'¹⁶ Henry's girlfriend Della offers another version of this ideology at work as

she plays a relatively submissive, even self-sacrificial role, and enacts certain cultural ideals that in turn inculcate the legitimacy of gender hierarchies.

In this sense Valdez promotes an exclusively male version of events and a perspective reflecting the essentializing tendencies of movement ideology which dichotomized a 'monolithic' male Chicano identity in response to Anglo-American domination. In such a climate women's politics faced strong opposition. Although they had been calling attention to their specific gendered oppression, race and class issues were seen as being more important and feminist issues, being closely allied to white feminism, were considered to be divisive. Homosexual and gay issues were also by and large absent from the political programme of the movement, and attempts to gain recognition were largely ignored. Lesbian sexuality in particular became outlawed, being seen as disruptive of the woman's role as reproducer, deemed necessary for reconstituting Chicano masculinity and culture.

Moraga's Alternative Model

Cherríe Moraga's dramatic output since the 1980s has consistently produced an alternative model of gender relations to this male-centred vision. Widely considered to be instrumental in bringing about 'a distinct transitional phase' in the development of Chicano theatre, her 1984 play, *Giving up the Ghost*, suggests the emergence of significantly new representational strategies and modes of performativity that move beyond the confines of movement ideology.¹⁷ While evolving in relationship to the Teatro of Luis Valdez, Moraga's approach to the representation of women is also clearly informed by ongoing developments in Chicana feminism, which aimed to disrupt the existing repressive enactment of female identity within Chicano discourse.

The action of the play, like that of *Zoot Suit*, takes place over a period of years in East Los Angeles, but while this urban space resembles that of the earlier play, it is not overtly associated with the *chicanismo* of *Zoot*

Suit. There are nonetheless productive tensions between the two plays, as the opening speaker tells us that the action, like that of the earlier play, also revolves around the question of 'prison, politics, and sex'.¹⁸ However, the prison in Moraga's play refers specifically to women's repression by movement ideology. Moraga's stage directions emphasize this, with the play centring on limited locations within which the female characters move. These locations, which are described as 'the street, a bed, a kitchen', reflect the three main spaces offered to women by movement discourse, and indicate its prescriptive and rigidly defined conception of female identity.

The action mainly revolves around these spaces as much as the three female characters and the relationships between them. This stands in strong contrast to prior depictions of Chicanas, not only in terms of highlighting women's central presence, but also because two of the lead characters are one and the same person. Marisa is a Chicana in her late twenties; Corky, her 'other' self, is shown aged eleven and seventeen. The other character is Amalia, a middle-aged Mexican woman who is Marisa's lover.

Although men are marginal to the narrative, Amalia's past male lovers, Alejandro and Carlos, haunt her, to the extent that they constantly interrupt the development of a fully erotic relationship with her new lover, Marisa. At the opening of the play, Marisa declares that the figure of the male lover 'is a ghost / always haunting her . . . lingering'.¹⁹ And again, later in Act One, when Amalia learns of Alejandro's death she simultaneously feels her womanhood leave her and his ghost being born in her. This sense of entrapment is contextualized through the strong association established between heterosexuality and loss and melancholia. Amalia later refers to the men who have used her sexually as a river of dead bodies, and through repeated allusions the predominant tone associated with heterosexuality becomes one of silence, trauma, and death.

Marisa must also relinquish the ghost of her younger self, Corky, whose experiences of rape and oppression haunt her older self

Marisa in the form of a pain that disables her, making her legs feel 'like they got rocks in 'em'.²⁰ In tracing the events that have led to this disablement, chronology in the sense of a teleological narrative and normative temporality are largely displaced from the action. Despite being contemporaneous with Corky's adolescence, the history and politics of the Chicano movement are decentred from the action because they don't enter the protagonist's world. Moraga thus displaces an overarching historicizing narrative such as that presented in *Zoot Suit* with several personal narratives, which instead present multiple interpretations that subvert established masculinist interpretations of the Chicano experience and of Chicano identity politics.

The juxtaposition of past and present narratives also fragments the essentialized female subject of movement discourse.²¹ Throughout the drama, the social roles of women and men are constantly undermined through complex and ironic manipulations of normative expectations about sexuality and gender. At one point during Act One, Corky's older self Marisa declares that:

It's not that you don't want a man,
You just don't want a man in a man.
You want a man in a woman.
The woman-part goes without saying.
That's what you always learn to want first.²²

Strategies of Female Representation

These transgressive gender positions can be read as a radical critique of female sexuality by movement ideology, which promoted a binary logic that legitimized the oppression of women. Marisa's viewpoint in contrast is not conventionally dichotomized by movement dogma, but sexualized in a way that undermines normative expectations.

The interchangeably butch-femme relationship between Amalia and Marisa presents sexualities which are crucial to Moraga's unsettling of the 'violent hierarchy of the man-woman' dyad on a number of different levels. In one sense they enact a performance that parodies the entrenched inequalities of the phallic economy represented by the traditional heterosexual partnership. But in a

more culturally specific sense their relationship, based as it is on 'wanting the woman first', is also a symbolic inversion of the Chicano cultural mandate of 'putting the male first' within Chicano families. Within this economy the mother is the betrayer of the daughter by loving the males in the family more than the females, thus bearing responsibility for the daughter's subordination and abandonment.

In her essay *A Long Line of Vendidas* (1983) Moraga states this more explicitly:

You are a traitor to your race if you do not put the man first. The potential accusation of 'traitor' or 'vendida' is what hangs above the heads and beats in the hearts of most Chicanas.²³

Under the pressure of the conflation of her sexuality with betrayal, the Chicana must prove her fidelity through commitment to the Chicano male, thereby initiating what Moraga terms 'A Long Line of Vendidas'. By putting women first in her dramatic productions, by excluding men from representation, and by imaging women as desiring subjects, Moraga represents the possibility of liberation from this 'prison of sex'.

Her strategies of female representation are an inherent part of this liberating project. Among the most significant is the simultaneous appropriation and critique of the symbolism linked with Mexican Catholicism.²⁴ During the play, women and women-centred relationships are often expressed in religious terms as a site of worship, or as a 'liberating angel', and are said to offer 'salvation' and 'redemption'. At one point during the second act, titled 'La Salvadora', Marisa declares, 'Sí. La Mujer es mi religion,' and later she places her mother at its centre,

'N' it was so nice to hear her voice
so warm like she loved us a lot
'n' that night
being cath-lic felt like my mom
real warm 'n' dark 'n' kind.²⁵

In this scene Moraga shifts the relations of power from the patriarchal conventions normally associated with Mexican Catholicism to Marisa's mother, who is instead figured as the source of religiosity. This feminization of

religion subverts the *macho* ethic of *aguantar* (forbearance) and subservience normally associated with the Church. The connection between the mother's faith and the daughter's belief in a vision of women bonding also disrupts the usual hierarchies established between God and the priest who exercises the secular control of religious power. By implication this also severs the ties that are normally established between the Church's institutionalized authority and its enactment through daily sexual domination.

Closely related to this positive identification between women and religion are the passages that describe the love between the female characters. In these scenes the relations between women are often figured as fluid and in opposition to the gendered binaries of movement logic. These exchanges occur particularly in the scenes in which Marisa and Amalia are collectively remembering the discovery of their mutual desire. At one point Marisa asks Amalia,

Was the beautiful woman
in the mirror of the water
you or me?
Who do I make love to?
Who do I see in the ocean of our bed?²⁶

The breaking down of physical borders and the merging of one self with another represents a link between a lack of boundaries and female sexuality that effectively undermines dominant narratives of identity promoted during the movement years.

The Role of Popular Culture

When the action switches to that period itself, we are shown how, as a younger woman, Marisa's sexual identity was also multiple, complex, and subversive. At times this complexity is revealed through the performance of what she calls her 'movie capture games'.²⁷ These 'sick little fantasies' ultimately disclose an identity that problematizes the dominant interpretations of female subjectivity in movement discourse:

When I was a little kid I useta love the movies
every Saturday you could find me there

my eyeballs glued to the screen
then during the week my friend Tudy and me
we'd make up our own movies
one of our favourites was this cowboy one
where we'd be out in the desert
'n' we'd capture these chicks 'n' hold 'em up
for ransom we'd string 'em up 'n'
make 'em take their clothes off . . .
strip we'd say to the wall
all cool-like
in my mind I was big 'n' tough 'n' a dude
In my mind I had all their freedom
the freedom to really see a girl
kinda the way you see
an animal you know?²⁸

Within Chicana/o discourse American movies are often presented as symbols of the United States' colonial legacy. Within this economy representations of Mexicans have traditionally been stereotyped and limited.²⁹ The domination of the cowboy in the narrative of the American West is a particularly clear indicator of the ways in which United States cultural imperialism has historically operated. The cowboy has effectively erased the presence of the *vaquero* and substituted that historical figure with a colonizing figure who eventually came to preside over the southwestern landscape. Corky's fantasy fails to acknowledge this fact and therefore displays none of the traditionally vexed intersections between Hispano, American, Indian, and Mexican cultures normally associated with this process. Instead, Corky in the main relies on Anglo-American heroics as a source for self-identification.

Critical opinion over the role of popular culture in the construction of Chicano and Chicana identity is deeply divided. Within the Chicana/o context, some critics consider that mass entertainment is ultimately a form of oppression that manipulates the audience into a complacent acceptance of the status quo,³⁰ while others see it as inherently subversive, and as providing an opportunity for Chicana/os 'to construct a form of political agency'.³¹

These polarized perspectives can be seen in Moraga's work. While she appears through lack of positive portrayals of Mexicans to turn to consumerized images of white male bravery in order to define herself, at the same

time Corky specifically entrenches herself in the discourse against which Chicanas stand. Her female 'captives' signal a profound lack of personal liberty, whereas freedom is equated with masculinity and the penetrating force of the male gaze. In Corky's fantasy, women possess no power or agency over their bodies, but occupy passive recipient positions. She simultaneously objectifies these women while identifying with the male subject of the action.

Agencies of Domination

As the drama unfolds, it becomes clearer why Corky adopts an identity that necessitates the repression of her own femininity, as at the centre of the second act are graphic descriptions of her earlier rape, retold by Marisa through a mixture of comedy and pathos. Marisa's speeches here, performed in opposition to the sanctity of patriarchal culture and religion, in effect restage a kind of secular confession that presents a radical shift in gendered power relations. Within Catholicism the vows of chastity and obedience function as church laws, and any infringement of them has to be confessed to the priest. As God's corporeal substitutes and emissaries, the father and the priest are invested with the power to mediate, punish, or absolve.

A mainstay of this power is the ritual of confession, which, as Foucault explains, unfolds within a power relationship in which 'the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks . . . but in the one who listens and says nothing'.³² Moraga disrupts the paternalistic nature of these relations, as Marisa's point of address during her confession is neither the symbolic father of the church or the priest, but the audience who act as her confessor.³³

Got raped once.
When I was a kid.
Taken me a long time to say that was exactly
what happened.
But that was exactly what happened.
Makes you more aware than ever that you are
one hunerd percent
female, just in case you had any doubts

one hunerd percent female whether you act
it or like it or not.³⁴

Marisa's speech poses fundamental questions about constructions of gender identity in the Chicana/o context. The guilt and shame the rape mobilizes, while clearly re-connecting her to her female self, are also strongly associated with the popular myth of Malinche, a central icon that contributed to what Norma Alarcón calls

the extensive ideological sedimentation of the . . . [silent] good woman and the bad woman archetypes that enabled the cultural nationalistic and paternalistic 'communal modes of power'.³⁵

According to movement discourse, Malinche was the *mujer mala* (the bad woman), whose sexual union with Hernan Cortes during the time of the conquest made possible the defeat of the Aztec nation.

Analyzing the stereotyping tendencies of this discourse, Emma Pérez argues how the myth of Malinche and the contempt for Chicana women began with a colonial conquest triangle, within which the indigenous male was castrated and lost his language to that of the white rapist father.³⁶ It is significant, then, that Marisa's violator is white, rapes her while speaking both English and Spanish, and is associated with a subtext that clearly demonstrates his paternal signification:

'n' I kept getting him confused in my mind
this man 'n' his arm
with my father kept imagining him my father
returned
come back
I wanted to cry 'papá papá' . . .
'¿Dónde 'stás papá?'
'¿Dónde 'stás?'
'n' finally I imagine the man answering
'aquí estoy. Soy tu papá'
'n' this gives me permission to go 'head
to not hafta fight'.³⁷

Subliminally imaging these paternal relations, Marisa's experiences establish their point of origin in the primal scene of colonial rape. But rather than suggesting a continuum in the economy of the masculinist myth that effectively silenced and marginalized women, her speech disrupts the previ-

ously repressive coding given to Malinche's legacy. This successfully enables a reconciliation of self and past experience for Marisa in a way that

enacts her simultaneous recrossing of the 'stages' of psychic development toward subjectivity and subjecthood . . . from primary narcissism and auto-eroticism to the disavowal of castration and a new body ego.³⁸

Moraga's exploration of the politics of Chicana identity in relation to popular culture and Chicano movement discourse thus forces a reconsideration of *Zoot Suit*. Displacing the binary logic which repressed women's representation during the protest decades, the multiple facets of Moraga's characters not only challenge the female identity of the earlier play, but, given El Teatro's masculinist tendencies, by extension simultaneously critique the homophobia, sexism, and oppressive gender definitions of movement discourse more generally.

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12. Valdez, Act Two, 'Zoot Suit Riots', p. 81.
13. Emma Perez, 'Speaking from the Margin: Uninvited Discourse on Sexuality and Power', in *Building with Our Own Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*, ed. Andela de la Torre and Beatriz Pesquera (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 57–71.
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18. Cherrie Moraga, *Giving up the Ghost* (Los Angeles: West End Press, 1986), p. 1.
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24. Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, 'Cherrie Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* and Feminist Theory', in *Critical Approaches to Hispanic Women's Literature*, ed. Norma Alarcón (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1987), p. 21.
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27. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
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33. Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 57–8.

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